

Reps. Connolly & Lankford Vow Further Subcommittee Action to Bring an End to Human Rights Abuses in Iraq, Afghanistan & Middle East Embassies

WASHINGTON – Congressman Gerry Connolly (D-VA) and James Lankford (R-OK) said they would hold further hearings on the human trafficking of foreign nationals employed by U.S. contractors following their House subcommittee hearing Wednesday on the human trafficking of foreign nationals employed by U.S. contractors in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in some U.S. embassies in the Middle East.

House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Procurement Chairman Lankford and Ranking Member Connolly agreed to follow up on the progress by federal agencies in ending the practice by contractors at the end of their hearing on the exploitation of third country national (TCN) workers overseas by prime and subcontractors.

“Even though they often are housed on-base at Department of Defense facilities and within secure perimeters for embassies operated by the State Department, many of these TCN workers live in sub-human conditions, are subjected to sexual abuse and even prostitution, have wages stolen by subcontractors, and have passports stolen in order to prevent them from leaving,” **Congressman Connolly said.** “These workers are promised good jobs with good wages and comfortable living conditions only to find a terribly different reality when they arrive to begin their jobs.”

“These labor practices violate every human value that we have as a country,” **said Congressman Lankford.**

“Our Departments of State and Defense stand up and fight for human rights around the globe but have turned a blind eye to these foreign workers. We believe that all men and women are created equal, and the United States must not stand idly by as these injustices occur on a daily basis under our nose.”

Connolly noted that nearly every service provided to maintain the military and diplomatic

presence in Iraq and Afghanistan is contracted out. Food service, fuel, security, vehicle maintenance, cleaning services, security construction, and many other services are handled by contractors.

After hearing from the senior employee of the DoD office responsible for preventing human trafficking, Connolly and Lankford said they were concerned that she had only one other employee and had never visited Iraq, where much of the human trafficking is taking place. Connolly also said he was shocked to find out that DoD and the State Department have never suspended or debarred a single contractor in Iraq or Afghanistan for human trafficking.

“With the pending U.S. exit from Iraq, the U.S. will rely even more on contractors in the region, exacerbating human trafficking abuses,” Connolly said. “Once we pull out the military, the void will be filled by contractors and human trafficking could explode.”

The two subcommittee leaders said they hoped that the federal agencies will step up efforts to bring an end to the human rights abuses and take action against those responsible. They said they intend to revisit the issue to determine if adequate progress has been made.